

Chapter 16:

MEDIA RELATIONS

“The media are not your organization’s public relations department,” Pat frequently reminded practitioners, “so stop expecting them to do your work for you!” Pat saw the media as merely a tool in the arsenal of information transfer and reinforcement. He advocated understanding media’s role in society and how they affect (or don’t affect) behavior.

“Most news that touches people’s lives comes from public relations sources, not media.”

– Pat Jackson, November 22, 1982

Vol.22 No.1
January 1, 1979

A PR Reporter Special Report:

TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY PROMOTE RISE OF PERSONALIZED MEDIA OFFERING INFORMATION TO ERODE CONTROL OF MONOPOLY MEDIA EMPHASIZING ENTERTAINMENT; IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS WILL COME INTO FOCUS DURING 1979

“The microprocessing revolution is equivalent to the industrial revolution,” believes John Naisbitt of Center for Policy Process (DC). “Americans have an appetite for information,” says tv newsman John Chancellor.

Chancellor’s Law: new forms of information-passing don’t drive out old, merely change them. For instance, books still important, even booming; tv didn’t kill radio. Effect of better info systems is to let people use time differently. To do this, people must control media, not be controlled by them.

Two factors are bringing this about. Technology is moving toward instant recall of data, entertainment, education anytime viewer desires. Economically this is possible because investment has shifted to audience (for equipment), whereas before it was in the hands of the medium. Newspaper plant, for instance, costs millions while reader buys copy for pennies. “Radio and television have had to be built upon entertainment, with information and education being squeezed onto the schedules,” researcher Anthony Smith notes.

Second factor: shift from self-denial ethic to self. Fitness and jogging, self-fulfillment cults, even change from barbers to hair stylists express this, says Robert Marbut, pres. Harte-Hanks Communications (San Antonio). So does search for religion, adds futurist Willis Harman. “More people want more information – but it’s not the same information,” Marbut told PRSA Institute. Today’s info market is personalized, fragmented. As a result, “mass media are on the way out.” Readers are “less loyal, more demanding, selective, occasional.”

Recent study, “The Home Terminal” by International Resource Development (New Canaan, Ct.) concludes power of tv networks will “significantly decline” in next 10 years as access to viewers becomes more diffuse. Marshall McLuhan’s electronic village is near, allowing everyone to customize everything all the time. Irony: that impersonal monster, the computer, is what makes such individualizing possible!

NEWSPAPERS AS WE KNOW THEM WILL DISAPPEAR, EXPERTS PREDICT

“Information consumers” care not what medium “information provider” uses, since all media are in information business.

Marbut says this won’t destroy newspapers, but will shift role and probably reduce circulations – just as mass circulation magazines gave way to smaller, special interest publications.

Prototype is Louisville Courier-Journal and Times’ “tailored” newspaper. Subscribers receive core section containing general news, can order variety of special sections that come with it. From million words of news in computer language now discarded weekly, special sections are typeset at touch of button. Publisher Barry Bingham, Jr., says goal is to deliver each subscriber what s/he wants, less of what they don’t read. Also has separate Saturday paper: a daily publishing a weekly. Ultimately,

material will go straight from newspaper's VDT to tv sets in home. Economics will dictate due to savings in newsprint, energy, transportation.

Bingham sees this freeing public from media monopolies. "Anyone can become a publisher." Only advantages of existing papers will be reputation, reader loyalty, skilled news staff, morgues. Deregulation of broadcast media (except engineering aspects) is required, he feels. Otherwise electronically-distributed newspapers would fall under fairness, equal time requirements.

PR TECHNIQUES ALREADY EVOLVED FOR WORKING WITHOUT MASS MEDIA

97/5 of U.S. dailies are monopolies. Chains own 59% of dailies with 71% of readership. Item: Combined Communications

(2 dailies, 7 tv and 12 radio stations, outdoor advertising) plans merger with Gannett (77 dailies). In Canada, France, situation is even more monopolistic. One right-wing ex-Nazi collaborator controls four of five Paris dailies, Parade reports. While broadcast has always been basically entertainment, print media have moved strongly in that direction. Arts, living, similar sections or articles predominate in newspapers. Personality stories, with accent on celebrities, are trend in magazines, wrote Amelia Lobsenz in 11/6/78 t&t.

Public relations response has often been to set up **alternative communications methods**. NYC employment agencies hired counsel to reach employers, job-hunters during recent newspaper strike. Jules Witcover tells of Nixon communications director Herb Klein's success in overcoming expertise of large media, which reported Nixon negatively. Klein worked with editors of small town media – "soft underbelly of American journalism" – for successful end run.

Internal communications emphasis is partly response to mass media's inability or refusal to cover business, institutional news and views. Managers realized employees constitute highly credible communications medium. Though recent study suggests execs haven't realized potential beyond such problem solving (pr 12/18/78), IABC claims oldtime house organ has diversified into explosion of sophisticated media types dealing with real issues (pr 9/18/78).

Major alternative is rise of personal media: face-to-face sharing of ideas built on personal relationships. During 1978 Texaco's investor relations program began stressing personal contact. Employee recruitment plans offered incentives for present workers to speak personally to friends or to network in community. GM continued its Civic Leaders meetings. Lobbying – major personal medium – continued to grow in importance. "There's nothing like personal contact," advised 7/17/78 t&t on lobbying. Census Bureau found conversations their second most effective vehicle, after newspapers, for informing public.

IMPLICATIONS OF MEDIA REVOLUTION FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

1. Deregulating tv, or cable, or teletext will **make television like radio** – an essentially local medium serving local

audiences. Adding diversity of this kind will destroy networks, Karl Meyer believes.

2. Will word processing **make individually typed letters suspect** as mass-produced? Because machines can turn out letters so fast, will they pollute channels of communication with unwieldy volume? Even personal correspondence is coming under attack.

3. Revolution **may reach newsletters within four years**, George Lutjen of McGraw-Hill estimates. Result will be newswires – data teletyped into side-band FM radio-actuated teleprinters on subscribers' desks. Cuts production costs, ends reliance on post office.
4. To meet info explosion, **tv news may become 24-hour operation** available on all channels, Chancellor thinks. He agrees new tech will fragment tv into specialized audiences just as tv did to radio and mags.
5. Modern electronic writing **requires better journalistic product**, cautions Business Wire. E.g., some editors judge stories by abstract printouts, which may be first 30 words. Overlong leads, or those with key facts buried, will not see print. AP/UPI style is requisite.

ACTION DURING 1979 WILL REVEAL WHERE WE'RE HEADED

Through technology, economics may be forcing them together, "tube and type are natural enemies like dog and cat," claims Saturday Review tv

critic Karl Meyer. For instance, network evening news contributed to downfall of pm newspapers. Chicago Daily News was 6th largest daily in the U.S. yet it quit last march despite 327,000 circulation. Bingham notes advent of tv caused decline in reading of newspapers. Average 36 minutes daily are now devoted to his papers, down from 48 minutes a decade ago. Indications:

- TV nets went before FCC in November to **urge approval for teletext** or similar system. Chairman Charles Ferris assured them agency encourages development. Expert Kenneth Edwards (U of Alabama) believes possibility of developing large ad revenues for system are good. He feels print media are worried.
- Mel Goldberg of ABC told AAPOR work in UHF technology could **expand number of tv channels** available. (See [pr 1/30/78](#)).
- U.S. Department of Justice has intervened in Postal Service **proposal for electronic mail** due to "significant competition issues" raised. Justice supports FCC move to greatly reduce prices networks pay for relays via satellite.
- Newspaper Ad Bureau urges publishers to **develop alternative delivery systems** to distribute "undailies" such as weekly papers, shoppers, penny savers, books, records, ad inserts.
- Suit by Universal Studios and Walt Disney Productions against Sony, **charging taping and replaying of tv programs is copyright infringement**, could have major impact on future of video cassette recorder.
- Development of three award-winning **computer languages for non-experts** – Samantha, Upgrade, Focus – should help overcome criticism computing is too complex for average citizen, stimulate interest in viewdata, personal computers, related technology.
- **Van Deerlin Bill to rewrite Communications Act of 1934** will get intense debate. Broadcasting industry is fighting hard against it to keep out competition. US Catholic Conference wants "fourth network," public broadcasting, to be assigned new responsibilities. Department of Justice favors deregulatory aspects. AT&T, ITT deeply involved.

NEW MEDIA SAMPLER

Example of smaller, segmented medium for special audience is quarterly *New Brooklyn*. Gives borough long in shadow of Manhattan own voice following demise of Brooklyn Eagle in 1959. *McCall's*, once flashiest mass magazine success, illustrates how it stays successful by moving with market. On spine and content page, but not cover, it dubs self "the magazine for suburban women." Media specialization can serve anyone.

PBS pushes ahead with **closed captioning units for deaf**, due out late 1979 following authorization by FCC. Units will print across screen dialog deaf viewers cannot hear. Like libraries' **talking books**, project will bring disadvantaged audience into mainstream.

Gannett-Combined Communications merger will create very special local medium when WHEC-TV (Rochester, NY) is sold to meet FCC rules. Will be first VHF network-affiliated **tv station owned by black-controlled company**.

Potential of rifle-shot media is seen in **18-30 age group**, which Marbut reports spends more time reading magazines than watching tv.

DO MEDIA GURUS MISLEAD FOR OWN PURPOSES WHEN THEY DEFINE "NEWS"?

"About 75% of the people in most western countries get all the *news* they ever get only from television." (Emphasis added.)

– Pierre Salinger of ABC at PRSA Conference

News about what? About politics or world affairs? Maybe . . . but most people get a lot of political information by the grapevine. As for news about the **important** things in their lives, such as home, job, the local hospital or church, people get news about these from word-of-mouth and, primarily, from public relations sources.

The idea that "news" consists of national or global events is another media hype, based on media misunderstanding of how the world really operates. Unlike journalists, people don't feel news reports are some kind of official record to live by. They live by reality, not what's printed or screened. Most news that touches people's lives comes from public relations sources, not media.

Some practitioners identify three types of "news" information. First is must-have information, such as data about highway construction between your home and office, a flu epidemic heading your way, etc. Next is nice-to-know. For instance, it may be useful that the legislature is planning a change in tax or real estate laws, although the effects will probably not be felt for some time. Third category is "the passing parade." This is primarily news as entertainment. Most "big" stories are of this type. Ask yourself, for instance, whether the Falklands war really touched your life, or even had the capability of doing so – or was it merely dramatic entertainment?

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THE MORE MEDIA COVERS AN ISSUE, THE MORE NEGATIVE OPINION BECOMES
EVEN IF REPORTING IS POSITIVE & ACCURATE; PERCEPTION RULES, NOT FACTS

Every controversy has 2 sides. Allan Mazur of SyracuseU contends that one side is the "establishment" & the other is the "challenge." On each side are passive members (who might express their view in an opinion poll) and active members (who try to influence the public). On an issue like nuclear power, where there are clearly opposing sides, the media serve as a link between the activists & the wider public. Therefore, media coverage of an issue increases during periods of activism. And activism peaks when there is national interest in the issue under protest.

Mazur's study concludes that as media coverage increases, the public's attitude becomes increasingly more negative. In other words, public opposition on a given issue is a function of the quantity of press coverage the issue receives. This is true even if the issue is not portrayed negatively by the media. Because a controversy has opposing sides, experts on both sides claim to be correct. When the issue is potentially dangerous to the public, it is likely that the public will embrace the safer of the two sides (as Maslow taught).

PERCEPTION MORE IMPORTANT
THAN KNOWLEDGE

"There is no linear correlation between knowledge and attitude toward nuclear power (see prr 2/25/80). It is unclear whether changes in technical knowledge lead people to change their attitudes. What people appear to have 'learned' as a result of TMI are perceptions about nuclear power. We believe attitudes shifted more in response to changes in perceptions of safety and perceptions of the trustworthiness of institutions than in response to changes in factual technical knowledge."

Hence, according to Mazur, nuclear power faced increased opposition after Three Mile Island due to the large number of articles that appeared in print. And due to the controversy presented in the coverage, whether or not the subject was treated objectively. This view assigns enormous power to the media. They can determine the fate & the outcome of an issue because they control the quantity of coverage given to the issue.

A new study by students of John Wilkes at Worcester Polytechnic Institute analyzes 375 articles from 3 regionally dominant papers before & after TMI. It corroborates Mazur's conclusion. Study finds that when presented with both sides of the issue, the public became increasingly disenchanted with the safety of nuclear power. This occurred even tho media coverage in one of the regions emphasized the safety of nuclear plants.

Another public opinion analysis from Worcester Poly shows that, while prior to TMI the media had a definite effect on public opinion, after TMI it was lost. New Haven, Ct. was pro-nuclear & had a pro-nuclear paper. Hartford was anti-nuclear and likewise its paper. After TMI, the Hartford region remained anti while the New Haven area swung drastically from pro to anti. This indicates that TMI greatly affected public opinion -- but also that the media lost its controlling grip over the public, concludes the study.

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AS INTEREST IN MEDIA FLUCTUATES AMONG STRATEGIC PRACTITIONERS, WHAT ARE REALISTIC PUBLICITY / MEDIA POLICIES, BASED ON RESEARCH? OPPORTUNITY 1986: LEARN THE TRUE ROLE AND POWER OF MASS MEDIA

Media, society and our knowledge of both have changed – are changing – dramatically. Public relations practice has also changed. But on the subject of media use/publicity there is an unsettled feeling. On one hand, many practitioners concentrate on publicity, limiting the field to a one-tool mentality. Most college curricula prepare “journalists” to enter public relations. Some publications essentially define public relations people as those who handle calls from the media.

On the other hand, practitioners have had outstanding success using only direct communication methods. Others follow the dictum of “make news, not news releases.” Thought leaders in the field have been moving away from communications toward applied behavioral science.

Where does this leave the working practitioner? Fortunately, scholarly study of the effects of media and of communication generally has been growing. While there may never be a cast-in-bronze solution for such a fluid situation, adequate guidance exists for each professional to establish a personal (or organizational) media policy.

NEED FOR A WORKING POLICY

Today’s managerial approach means public relations must be measured behaviorally. What did someone do, not do, or let your organization do as a result of public relations efforts? The objective is stimulating behavior, reinforcing or modifying it. Influencing opinion or attitudes, showing that messages were received – even securing positive feedback – are not enough, except as way stations

HOW PRACTITIONERS SPEND THEIR TIME

<u>Spend Most Time On (Rank Order)</u>	<u>% Spending 25%+ Time</u>
Managing publicity	24.8%
Public relations planning	19.3
Advertising and marketing	18.6
Counseling	16.3
Writing/editing employee pub’ns	14.8
Strategic planning	14.0
Community relations	12.8
Issue management	12.3
Promotions and special events	11.2

Note: Of nine activities on which respondents spend 25% or more of their time, five deal with planning, counseling or issue management.

<u>THE SPECIALTIES: Important functions but not engaged in by generalists</u>	<u>% Spending 5% Or Less Time</u>
Preparing video/info programs	84.6%
Fundraising	83.8
Photography	81.6
Lobbying	81.5
Audio visuals	78.8
Consumer affairs	77.9
Graphics	75.9

– from pr reporter’s 21st Annual Survey of the Profession, 1985

toward behavior. Public relations needs to give evidence that some action occurred.

- The question about mass media, about publicity is therefore: what power can they exert on people's behavior?

THE SEMINAL RESEARCH

Diffusion Process, or the Two-Step Flow of Information and Influence, remains the basic underpinning. Though the original work of Lazarsfeld, Katz and others is 40 years old, and contemporary scholars like Everett Rogers are refining the usefulness of the theory regularly, the essence is intact:

1. Information by itself has almost no power to influence behavior or attitudes.
2. Impersonal media like print and broadcast are effective and efficient ways to a) create awareness and b) satisfy the information-seeking that follows awareness.
3. To gain adoption of an idea, product or behavior, personal media (people, experts, opinion leaders) are necessary in order to provide psychological support and social acceptability.

The six steps in the Diffusion Process are a map of how people (and groups) make decisions:

<u>Phase I</u> <u>Awareness</u>	<u>Phase II</u> <u>Information</u>	<u>Phase III</u> <u>Evaluation</u>	<u>Phase IV</u> <u>Trial</u>	<u>Phase V</u> <u>Adoption</u>	<u>Phase VI</u> <u>Reinforcement</u>
Learns about an idea or practice but lacks detail.	Gets facts, develops interest, sees possibilities.	Tries it mentally, weighs alternatives.	Social - acceptability, experimentation.	Full-scale use, adopts it.	Continued commitment, unswerving.

Mass media are effective only in phases I, II and VI, according to the research.

AGENDA-SETTING FUNCTION

If media are not able to get publics to act, what is their utility to practitioners? According to studies by Max McCombs and others

...while the media may not tell us what to think, they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think **about**.

Summarizing his research in *Public Relations Review* (Winter 1977), McCombs wrote, "Considering that the overt goals of mass communication are primarily to inform and to entertain, the fact that the mass media have more impact on awareness and knowledge than on attitudes and overt behavior is not that surprising."

Media can't persuade us how to vote, but they do have a voice in determining which candidate gets talked about at the cocktail party, church supper or water cooler discussion where **personal media** are at work.

He also estimates the time lag between appearance of a topic in the media and its appearance on the public agenda as three to five months on average. This depends greatly on the salience of the topic, the extent of its coverage and competing agenda items, however.

THREE TYPES OF NEWS

Various forms of social communication distribute 1) need-to-know, 2) nice-to-know and 3) entertainment (or The Passing Parade) information. They are judged as essential in this order, although their recreational value is inverse. The extent to which a medium carries each type of news material determines its value for a practitioner's purpose of the moment.

This approach destroys the myth that people eagerly await newspapers or news broadcasts. If they do, found Jim Grunig in 1978, it's not because they need – or can even use – the information. He concluded, "There's nothing in mass media that people have to know. For example, most national politics don't affect them directly, nor do floods, disasters and other news items."

Instead, people's **level of involvement** in a subject determines whether they will seek information – or merely **process** it when it crosses their paths. Grunig says practitioners who ignore this fact may be reaching the wrong audiences, wasting time and budget in the process. He stresses these implications:

1. If aiming at a **low involvement public**, which **doesn't need the information** (most broad public issues fall in this category). . .use **mass media**, especially tv, because it forces audiences to process the data.
2. If aiming at **involved publics**, who are **actively seeking information** on your subject. . .use **specialized publications** such as trade or subject magazines, newsletters, direct mail.

If you don't need a car, argues Grunig, tv ads are effective because they make you aware of available models and brands even though you don't need that data for the moment. But if your car is ready for trade, would you spend the day in front of your tv waiting for car ads?

CONGRUENCE / SELECTIVE PERCEPTION

For many years studies have shown that media – in fact all communications – face an awesome task in persuading because of human reluctance to be persuaded – at least on subjects where prior knowledge exists. This is because of "selective perception." People tend to agree with media coverage that is congruent with their pre-existing opinions, and disagree with coverage that contradicts those opinions. Thus

...media stories are most persuasive with people who have already adopted the viewpoint they present, rather than converting those with opposing views.

Again, the **reinforcement** value of media.

TOO MUCH MEDIA COVERAGE BACKFIRES

The more media cover an issue, the more negative opinion becomes – even if reporting is positive and accurate. Every controversy has two sides. Allan Mazur of Syracuse University contends that one side is the "establishment" and the other is the "challenge." On each side

are passive members (who might express their view in an opinion poll) and active members (who try to influence the public). On issues where there are clearly opposing sides, 1) the media serve as a link between the activists and the wider public; 2) therefore, media coverage of an issue increases during periods of activism, 3) and activism peaks when there is national interest in the issue under protest. Mazur's study concludes that

...as media coverage increases, the public's attitude becomes increasingly more negative. In other words, public **opposition** on a given issue is a function of the **quantity** of press coverage the issue receives.

This is true even if the issue is not portrayed negatively by the media. A controversy has opposing sides and both claim to be correct. When the issue holds potential danger for the public, it is likely the public will embrace the safer of the two sides (as Maslow taught).

THE THIRD PERSON EFFECT

If the mass media are limited in their ability to persuade, why do they seem so powerful and important? Because of the phenomenon known as the "third person effect," identified by Davison in 1983.

When scholars study the impact of media on target publics, they find it minimal as a rule. But if they study the impact of the same material on managers who feel media coverage is relevant to them, a completely different result occurs.

Executives tend to be media watchers – or have it watched for them. Coverage relevant to their organizations (and others they are familiar with) inevitably comes to their attention. The circles in which these movers and shakers travel are populated with fellow movers and shakers. They notice the coverage, good or bad, which they and their peers get – and mention it to one another. These "third person" comments imply the media coverage has power. The assumption is that if their friends have seen the story, everybody has.

MEDIA USERS CAN SUCCEED IF:

1. They assume target publics are only **mildly interested, or not interested at all**, and plan accordingly.
2. **Specific, reasonable goals are set.**
3. **Systems are set up**, such as skills or knowledge testing, so info received can be translated into behavior.
4. **Specific target audiences are delineated.** This includes demographics, psychological attributes, lifestyles, value and belief systems, mass media habits.

Who says so? Harold Mendelsohn, whose studies linking info to research have given new value to communication campaigns.

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THE MEDIA ARE DANGEROUS NOW; THEY'VE BECOME PART OF THE PROBLEM

With all the issues on which the public needs information, pack journalism leads to the same "news" from every medium, driving audiences away. Top story of 1990, finds a reader poll, was the Gulf situation (67% followed it). Only 38% followed November elections or the drug war. 30% at maximum followed the changes in Eastern Europe. But 75% knew about Pres. Bush's dislike of broccoli.

60 Minutes and Natural Resources Defense Council are being sued by Washington apple growers for irresponsible reporting leading to the Alar scare. Yet other media simply repeated the allegations rather than doing the journalist's job by questioning them.

Every practitioner has his favorite similar story of media abuse – yet thousands of us continue to chase the media. However, an increasing number of wise heads are opting for a low media profile – going directly to key publics via the many communications techniques now available.

This is an important decision for every organization – which requires public relations knowledge at the senior management table.

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NEW MEDIA STRATEGY: 1) DISTINGUISH BETWEEN *REPORTORIAL* MEDIA AND *ACCESS* MEDIA, 2) EMPHASIZE LATTER TO WORK AROUND FORMER, 3) TRAIN OFFICERS AND SPOKESPERSONS TO GO OUT FRONT PERSUASIVELY

“News media is an oxymoron,” said a journalist in pr’s 12/9/91 issue. Their commitment to presenting traditional news – defined as info to help citizens make decisions – has been replaced with sensationalizing and entertaining. And reporters come and go so fast, even on major media, that building relationships with them is nigh impossible.

ONE COPING STRATEGY IS TO GO AROUND THE MEDIA DIRECT TO PUBLICS

Research has shown media coverage has a far greater chance of being harmful – since people like reportage of bad news over good news by 7 to 1. Plus, positive coverage doesn’t persuade, change minds or motivate behavior in 99% of cases. And the “mass” audience has shrunk greatly. Media’s demonstrable value is 1) awareness – the “new” in “news”; 2) reinforcement for those who already believe what you’re telling them.

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On rare occasions changed circumstances, new developments, just the right and unexpected spokesperson or a brilliantly scientific message may go out via media and cause that least used and understood part of pr’s tool kit, *cognitive dissonance*. All media add in such cases is the “medium.” Most often presentday journalists want to go beyond “medium” to be “mediators” – forcing contending camps to fight it out in their pages or programs. Going direct is eminently practical.

GROWING SPLIT IN TYPES OF MEDIA LEADS TO ANOTHER NEW STRATEGY

Distinguished between closed, controlling, judgmental **reportorial journalistic media**; and open, revelatory, direct-to-audience

access entertainment media. As presidential candidates are again proving, the latter can be used 1) not only to go around the former, but 2) to get coverage by them that is at least a bit harder to twist. Capably handled, it’s a doubleheader. **Access media** include:

- 1) **tv host and call-in shows**
- 2) **tv advertorials**
- 3) **radio talk shows** (pr 6/8/92)
- 4) **radiomercials** (pr 12/2/91)
- 5) **public affairs panels** (but be sure you can “bridge” your message and personality past journalists on the panels)
- 6) **advertorials in print media** (like ads, let you tell an unedited story, but in a journalistic style – pr 1/20/92 and 2/10/92)

In each, what the medium does is put *your spokesperson directly in front of the audience* – avoiding news broadcasts’ interpretative filter.

Ross Perot announced his candidacy on “Larry King Live.” Bill Clinton played his saxophone on Arsenio Hall. Donahue, “Today,” “Good Morning America” have all put candidates on air. Bush-Quayle press secretary Victoria Clarke told *USAToday* they are looking for ways to take their message “directly to voters.” [That will be a change. In a NH primary appearance next door to prr’s office, the only people admitted to a widely advertised “open meeting” were carefully selected invitees who were all Bush partisans. No tough questions in front of the cameras, please.]

CHARACTERISTICS OF ACCESS MEDIA

Projected personality is as crucial here as issues and persuasion. The best access

medium is tv, since viewers can study style, body language and other *non-verbal clues* to honesty, caring and similar attributes of trustworthiness.

Attack Journalism and Entertainment Journalism have eroded the credibility and destroyed the “fairness and balance” claims of reportorial media. Ironically it is exactly these traits access media play to: a) themes invariably are the hot topics, often playing to violent disagreements; b) their aura is one of entertainment more than enlightenment. This conundrum spotlights the real difference between the two media types:

- **Reportorial media** are perceived to (and often do) twist their coverage with carefully selected film footage and quotation, often out of context.
- **Access media** at least give the person in the hot seat a chance to speak for him/herself, to fight back – and that’s what the public believes “fairness” is. Reportorial journalists think it means finding one voice that disagrees with a subject – even if it’s the only dissenter in the universe – then running that person’s comments to “balance” the story.

That direct confrontation with audiences, or in front of them, is the power access media offer. Access media let people speak for themselves.

Says a *Rolling Stone* media critic: these are “prototypical 21st century media.” It’s a way to overcome “cynical electorates and adversarial media,” says *US News & World Report*, adding: “*Great politicians learn to deliver their messages through the media of the day.*”

As do pr practitioners, whose role will more than ever be **training** clients for access media duty, **advising** them on all aspects of appearances there, and **judiciously selecting** the right shows – and placing people on them under hospitable circumstances, of course.

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ITEMS TO CONSIDER IN CREATING A "SURGICAL" MEDIA STRATEGY

With the possible exception of simple product promo/service reminder efforts, getting your product's or organization's "name in the paper" for visibility purposes is today nonsensical. Unless yours is a virtually unknown entity and the goal is simply to become known – the old "just spell my name right" strategy.

Same is true of promo events, where sponsors get their name attached, are allowed to hang a banner or appear in the program. **There's no evidence either type of visibility motivates behavior or influences attitudes.** The assumption must be that people say, "X Co. sponsored the concert, therefore it must be a good outfit and I will seek it out to do business." *Really?!*

WHY A DIFFERENT APPROACH IS REQUIRED

- A. **News media are changing** – not just in loss of credibility and reach, but in tone of coverage
 - Even in basic product news – the type of publicity most often sought by marketers – the "news" angle too often now is fear-mongering (if you raise your head above the bushes and call attention to your product). "If you eat that or use this or do such-and-such, there may be hidden germs, carcinogens or radioactivity lurking to get you." Check any medium and see the evidence
- B. **Media-use patterns are changing**, e.g. despite the hype, it's newspapers not tv that deliver the news (prr 9/11/95); NPR is where you reach opinion leaders; the under-35 crowd are notorious anti-consumers of news in any form
- C. **PR is being measured differently.** Wise management expects behavior change or motivation, not more information dumped on unwilling publics

WHY THEN DO WE STILL BOMB MEDIA WITH PRESS RELEASES?

training to work with media. The idea a pr person is ever going to *write* the article is ludicrous. One needs to be able to persuade them it's news and explain the details strategically – not write the article or film the item for them.

Any decent medium has to rewrite anyway, so fact sheets are better. This is why a practitioner needn't have journalism

Making news not news releases is better still. Yet telephone boiler rooms for placements are still common.

What is known in today's contentious times is that visibility turns some folks off and others on. Unless you have a pretty good indication of what the head count will be – e.g. more for you than against – **it's a gamble.**

WHY GAMBLE WHEN SURGICAL PRECISION IS POSSIBLE?

“Surgical” means precisely what the term implies: placements in exactly the right media for your purpose.

- It requires knowing **which media your target stakeholders actually read**, watch or hear. Assumptions are dangerous, so intelligence work is needed
- In issue cases or legislative support, it may mean **targeting a single key person** and placing a story in the medium he reads – or has clipped for him
- A single such placement is **worth a folder of untargeted clips**

Example: You're working on a regulatory matter and Sen. Jones from Louisiana is key. Don't expect him to see, be shown or *believe* what the *WashPost* or *NYTimes* write. Place something in the New Orleans Times-Pic, however, and you can rest assured his staff will clip it for him – because it was also seen by his *constituents*. Give the story a local angle, or a local person, and that's good surgical media use.

1. **Deal with key reporters as you do with analysts**, customers, elected officials – face-to-face. Build lasting relationships that *serve* the journalists.
 - As a senior writer said in [prx 3/21/94](#): “Call, make personal contact” to place stories – and never use computer address labels on anything, since it signals that “10,000 other reporters are on the same mailing list.”
2. **Don't let pr firms own these relationships.** They may well have access to the journalists you need. That's an advantage they offer. But make them introduce you so you can create a relationship, not be beholden to your firm to work with this person.
 - Also don't just tell your firm you “want ink,” but target their efforts specifically and surgically
 - Perhaps ask them to work the less likely media, but keep key media for staff work – so you own those relationships
 - Or target their market-support efforts on audiences for which there is no ad budget, achieving truly integrated communications

SOME BASIC QUESTIONS A SURGICAL STRATEGY MUST ANSWER

1. How to use media to **target opinion leaders** – and exactly which media?
 2. How to apply **the 20/80 rule** – to reach the 20% of stakeholders that give you 80% of your business, issue support, admissions, votes or whatever?
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3. How to **encourage feedback** so can stimulate face-to-face, i.e., whose latent readiness to act on the subject is strong enough to want to step forward?
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GOOD OL' RADIO MAY BECOME AN IMPORTANT PR TOOL AGAIN

Prediction: local stations will revert to news and talk, especially the opinion-leader reaching NPR affiliates, as the only way to differentiate themselves – because of two imminent triggering events:

1. **Launch of two national radio channels**, XM and Sirius, this month. These are national channels, broadcast via satellite. Each will have 100 stations, expected to be half music, half talk formats. Sound will be digital quality (think CDs). You'll need a special radio or adapter to get them at first, and they may be by subscription initially (\$10/mo) – but once tuned in you can drive from Eastport, Maine to San Diego, from Seattle to Miami without moving the dial or any interference or fading
2. **Launch of low power super-local FM stations**. The first 255 licenses were granted in 20 states last month and will become operable within weeks. Those in the other 30 states will be granted early this year. Covering only about 3-1/2 miles of territory, they are being awarded basically to public interest organizations, churches, universities, schools and the like

IMPLICATIONS FOR RADIO

Whatever music format local radio uses – there are few talk radio stations left – it will be available with multiple choices on national radio. Even specialty formats like Spanish language will have maybe 20 choices. The classical music/jazz/folk backbone of public radio will have dozens of national competitors.

But a station that switches to covering local news, offering once-popular local talk shows and featuring local talent can probably prosper by “putting Jones County on the air.”

There are issues. Will all national ads go to national stations? FCC estimates 18% of radio ad dollars now are national. Whether or not national ads are lost, can local ad revenue cover the cost of news operations? It's far more costly than flipping discs – but talk and call-in shows aren't much more expensive than disc jockey shows. Will low-power specialty stations draw off enough listeners to destroy regular local stations? (That's why the broadcasting industry forced Congress two weeks ago to severely cut the number of local licenses FCC originally planned). Will more than a handful listen to low-power radio? Indeed, will enough tune in or subscribe to national stations to make them viable?

- **One thing's certain: There will now be AM ... FM ... XM ...and Sirius all after the nation's ear. And don't forget Internet radio, which is moving from simply carrying existing stations to real stations with their own programming**

IMPLICATIONS FOR PR

Radio will now be a medium of supertargeted, segmented stations, not just by geographic area but *within* geographic areas. Like magazines and cable tv, there'll be a specialty outlet for every interest – locally and nationally.

1. This will be a **huge new outreach opportunity** for practitioners, like the old days when radio placements were important
2. The audience will be **pre-selected for targeting**

3. **The need for content will be immense.** Stations will embrace pr pros who can provide balanced, objective material and not over-hype their client/employer

One media irony: Despite their fragmented and badly declined readership, newspapers are now the major “mass media.” The exception is a few occasional network or syndicated tv events, but placements there are rarely available – well, a few “product display” opportunities, maybe.

This is no fly-by-night. Both XM and Sirius are \$billion investments to date with very large broadcasting facilities ready to go, e.g. XM has 80 studios. XM’s investors include DirecTV, GM and Clear Channel, with Hughes providing the satellites. All car brands have agreed to build in receivers.
